

ONE SHILLING OR ON CLOTH EIGHTEEN-PENCE

Little Girls

Visit

Let

Flower

Garden



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Little Girls
Visit

Our
Country
Garden

THE FLOWER-GARDEN.

AGNES MARSHALL lived with her papa and mamma in a tall dark house in a narrow street of Manchester. Her papa was busy all day long with the workmen in his mills and the goods in his warehouse, and her mamma was often ill, so they never could leave the town.

Poor Agnes had never been in the country. She had seen nothing but streets, and houses, and churches, and cotton-mills. She had seen pictures of pretty flowers, and had a pot of lank mignonette on the window-sill, and sometimes mamma had sent to the market for a bunch of flowers; but they always looked pale and sickly, for, like the children of the town, they wanted fresh air.

But at last mamma took Agnes on a visit to the country, to see a most beautiful garden. It was full of the rarest flowers; for the owner was a rich man, and loved flowers.

Agnes had never seen anything like this garden in all her life. She thought it must be fairyland. "Mamma," said she, "I think these bright flowers must all be fairies."

"I do not expect we shall see them skip about, or hear them speak to us," said mamma; "but some wise men believe that every creature the good God has made to live enjoys its life; and these flowers may be happy in the sunshine. I will tell you a story about flowers."

THE FLOWERS AND THEIR QUEEN.

There was a grand flutter of leaves in the flower-garden one sunny morning of summer; all the flowers were in a wild trembling state; a thunder-



storm could not have moved them more, and we know a thunder-storm in a flower-garden is enough to vex any flower. The *Convolvulus* shook its graceful head till it nearly-lost hold of the wall; the *Sunflower* looked fiercer than ever; the *Jasmine* and the *Syringa* sighed till the air was sweet; and the *Thistle* pushed out all its sharp thorns with anger.

"We must have a change in the order of things," said a golden *Calecolaria*. "A hundred years ago it might be very well to name the *Rose Queen* of the Flowers. That was the age of hedge-primroses and meadow-cowslips, and I grant that even a *Cabbage Rose* rose high above such a vulgar race of flowers. But in these days, when the garden is in its glory, and flowers contend for honours, and win the prizes they deserve, I say it is absurd to hold that the *Rose* is the *Queen* of all flowers; and I propose that we should make a new and better choice."

"I second the motion of my brilliant American friend," said an African *Marigold*. "If we come over from distant sunny climes, and shiver through the frosts and snows of dismal England, are we to bow down before a common-cottage-garden *Rose*? I protest against it!"

"I have no wish for greatness," said the smiling, contented *Thrift*. "I am only one of the people. Our race is widely spread; we are free flowers; we love the sands of the sea-shore; but we are welcome guests in the cottage-garden, and quite as much at home round the parterres of the palace. I want no honour myself, but I will hear all your murmurs and your wishes, and tell you what I think of them."

"I will help you," said *London Pride*. "I do not want to become a queen myself, but with all my petals I love a Queen. The greatest Queen in the world is a namesake of mine—*The Pride* of London. Now, lady flowers, what have you to say?"

A superb, tall, well-shaped *Tulip*, lifted still higher its vase-like head and spoke first,—

"I have much reason to murmur. I think great neglect is shown to my rank and beauty. What would this much-praised garden be without the *Tulip*? Common! worthless! Friends and flowers of all nations, observe me well; look at my strong, handsome, and erect stem, which bends before the breeze and rises again unhurt. Is there a fault in my figure? Admire the six



smooth-edged petals which expand to form my cup; look at the pure white lining of the cup, with lines of lovely shades; while outside are blended rich hues of scarlet, of violet, of silver, and of gold. This is the dress of a queen; and no wonder when men first looked on the Tulip they should go mad for it. In my native home in the East, the lazy Turk smokes his pipe in his costly tulip-garden, and is happy. The Grand Sultan himself honours me, and for my glory holds his splendid Feast of Tulips. The heavy Dutchman, who loves his money so much, loves his Tulips still more, and will pay untold riches to obtain a flower he desires. More care has been spent on our race than on any other plant of the world. This is our fame; we stand alone, royal by our nature. We are the Tulip."

"Yes, yes," said the sober Thrift, "we know you well; one of your kind—a poor branch, perhaps—runs wild over the chalk soil in every wood and field in the middle of England."

"A slander on our pure order," said the proud flower. "We own no wild brethren in this land, and we claim our rank in the garden on our own merits."

"Pride is no merit," said the Thrift; "we will look into your claims. You are a well-dressed flower, but you are a little out of fashion. Stand aside, my lady Tulip."

"May I speak?" said the Fuchsia, blushing very much, and hanging down her head modestly, for she never looked any one in the face. "I am a stranger, but I believe I am very much liked in England. When I first came I was very shy, and could only live in a snug room, or among sickly shrubs in a greenhouse; but I am now strong and hearty, and care little for the cold of winter. In my native home I belong to a wide-spreading family, that cheer the road of many a lonely wanderer; and when my bloom is past away, I give my fruit for food to man or to the birds of the air. I wear my purple and rose-coloured dress with pride, and am proud to be the true old Fuchsia, and I humbly assert that my beauty is rarer than that of the Tulip."

"We are English," said the Willow Flower. "We want no American ruler. I think I am as handsome as the Fuchsia. I lift my blossoms high above the rest, and flourish in any spot without nurture or care. What foreign flower can say as much?"

"Stay, good flower," said the Fuchsia; "no one here will dispute your rank in the woods or the fields. You are tall and strong; but the gardener does not approve of your habits. You encroach on his best parterres, and scatter your seed among his choicest flowers. You are not content with your proper place, and he looks on you as a weed rather than a flower. You are the weed Willow Herb; I am the Fuchsia."

"Be silent, fair ones!" said London Pride; "we think Willow Herb an upstart. We admire Fuchsia, but she will not be our Queen."

"No one dare appeal against the judgment of stately London Pride," said a bright crimson Poppy, the tallest and gayest of the dashing family, "but I offer myself to be judged by old Thrift, one of our English, home-bred, sea-loving flowers, and who, I know, will never be duped by foreign flowers, that boast of their sunny homes. I always thought the Tulip a stiff, Dutch-looking flower, daubed with many-coloured splashes, and needing a shade from the sun and the rain—so unlike a real English flower. Nor do I like the airs of the Fuchsia, be she red, green, or flesh-colour. If the garden must have a queen, look at home, honest friend Thrift. We Poppies are children of the soil, we have risen in the world, I will not deny, and now we can hold up our heads in the best English garden without shame among the most high-bred flowers; so I hope my faithful friends will stir every leaf, and put forth bud and blossom, to elect an English queen, and to put down foreign upstarts. What say you, Thrift? Am I a proper flower to rule?"

"You are a rising flower, young Poppy," said Thrift, "and make a good figure in the garden, though you were but the other day brought from the corn-field. But we cannot allow you to make long speeches; for see, all the flowers are looking sleepy, and I have heard that there is poison in your breath for men as well as for flowers."

"I deny any guilt in the matter," said Poppy, looking very red. "The sap that flows in my veins gives health to the sick and rest to the mourner. Is it my fault if men will abuse such a blessing? But I see all your eyes are closing, which I think such an insult, that I retire from the contest."

But just then the air was filled with perfume, and the drowsy flowers raised their heads at the spicy breath of the rich Carnation. The proud flower rested her slender form on a green rod for support, and said,—





"I alone ought to be Queen of the garden. Thrift and Pride, look at me. You will find in the form of my petals order and grace; in their colour, splendour; in their breath, that matchless fragrance which the flowers of the East boast to be quite their own. And yet I am truly a flower of our own land; my parents were the Clove Pink of the fields, but care and culture have made me the Carnation, which the whole world admire, and which they have named the Divine Flower! My foes call me the Lady Disdain; but it is my nature to disdain only the mean and vulgar. I am formed for a queen."

"Where were you in the frost and snow of last winter?" said an old Mezercon.

"My flowers were then sleeping, rude and aged plant," replied the Carnation; "but my long and graceful grass made the garden gay when Nature had swept away its brightest flowers. You were not sleeping. It was then that you lifted your green head to tempt the bee to taste and die. I say no more."

"You have said a great deal, Madam Carnation," said London Pride, "and we think you have made out a good case; but we must hear all."

"I must say a word, my old friends," said a very popular flower, a sturdy Wallflower, in the beauty of a bright old age. "If you will have a new Queen, what do you think of an honest, plain flower like me? I was well known and well liked before half these painted strangers had ever been seen in England. I am nursed by the peasant in his cottage, and by the poor workman in his humble garret. I cheer the prisoner in his cell, and adorn the parterre of the palace. I wave my dark blossoms on the walls of many a grand city in ruins, on the holy mountains of Palestine, and in the bright gardens of heathen Persia. The smoke of the city never affronts me, and I give my sweets as freely to the poor as to the rich. If you think as I do, you will at once choose me for your Queen."

"I look down upon you, vulgar flower!" said a tall, rich Rhododendron. "I have but to show myself and conquer. From the heights of the Alps, where no meaner flower dare to climb, to the moist woods of Africa, the dry plains of Asia, and the wild marshes of America, I raise my proud crest. The burning sun, the bleak wind and the snow-storm, war against me in vain. I am a flower of the world; I submit to spend my life here among low shrubs

and home-bred flowers; but I am not of the common crowd, and my nature is noble, and I now ask this fair crowd: Who is your fit Queen?"

"A very modest flower, indeed!" said old Thrift; "but I do not fancy you will be at the head of the poll. And, friend Wallflower, you had better stand aside; you are a rich old native, but your vagrant habits would give offence. A Queen should keep her place: you would be sure to forget this, and your subjects might some day find their Queen smiling on the walls of a ruined pig-sty. But we have others to listen to; though last, not least."

Then was seen the fairest flower of the field or the garden, the pure and holy Lily, that scented the sacred plains when the Lord of heaven and earth trod them, and pointed to the simple blossom to warn His people to trust in Him.

There was a murmur of pleasure when the lofty Lily bowed its glorious head, and said: "I come at the call of my fair and fragrant friends; but I desire no greater honour than my own never-dying name, and am content that the world should look on me as the most favoured flower of the creation. Till time shall be no more, men will see in me a model to imitate; and children will be called upon to become like me, pure, simple, and humble. I am the same spotless flower that our Saviour looked upon in the fields of holy Palestine. From thence I was brought by the brave soldiers who fought under the cross of Christ, to be planted in a Christian country, that Christians might see me, and never forget the words of their Lord: 'Consider the Lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.'"

"You may think what you will, Thrift and London Pride," said a bold red-faced Pæony, "but I say this pale flower cannot pretend to be a Queen, and you need not look far from you to find the right flower. I have come here all the way from China, where I have a name fourteen hundred years old. I do not profess to be humble and lowly: I am proud: and well I may. No one can show so many brilliant and well-formed petals. And a Queen ought to have pure, noble sap in her veins, which there can be no doubt I have."

"I also might, if I chose," said the meek Lily, "boast of royal honours. For



ages the fair and honoured Lily of France has called her warriors to conquest, and crowned the brows of her brightest heroes; though, alas! its pure blossoms have been too often stained with blood. The glorious Rose of England has long held her honours here, unchanged and unblamed. Why do her favoured subjects move their leaves in complaint now? Be wise, then, happy people of the garden, and ask no change but such as the bounty of your Creator grants, the changes of the seasons. The Rose is your Queen and my faithful friend and ally; preserve, with loyal hearts, your old submission, like English-bred flowers."

Some of the sullen flowers, low-born and envious, murmured hints about French manners and high-bred conceits; but all the noblest flowers of the garden were glad to be the friends of the Royal Lily.

But, now there arose a mighty flutter of petals, as if the west wind was sporting among them, for every flower opened wide, and shed its sweetest odours to welcome the pride of the Garden, the Flower of Beauty, the peerless Rose Queen.

Every murmur was hushed; the sun shone brighter than ever, as he always does when the Queen appears; and all the blossoms burst forth in full-blown glory.

The Rose threw off her mossy cloak, shook her gauzy petals, and a dewy fragrance filled the air as she said:—"Who are the traitors that rebel against their lawful ruler, that would dethrone the Queen of long ages, chosen by nature as the emblem of love and beauty? Who would desire to quit my domain? If any, let them seek the highways and the hedges; they are no longer worthy to dwell in my court."

All were silent, though a few hung their heads. "Then," said the fair Queen, "if none speak, I will hope all are content. There is not a flower here that does not add a grace to the garden, though all are not fit for high stations."

"I declare the Rose to be our rightful Queen," said Thrift: "the first of flowers in freshness, in beauty, in perfume, and in grace. The Tulip, with her painted petals and golden heart, is a splendid show, but scentless and gandy: she is not a queen flower. The Fuschia is too feeble and too foreign to hold the sceptre in an English garden. The bold Poppy belongs to the ranks, and must not aspire at greatness. The Carnation is among the nobles, fit flower to



grace a court, but unfit to rule. The rustic Wallflower we can love, but we could not obey. The Lily is, indeed, a Royal flower, worthy of the Crown Imperial at her side. Long may they dwell in their sunny home in peace; but the Rose, which owns her as a friend, but not as a rival, is our Queen."

And when the flowers heard this they tossed up their bright heads, and shook their dewy leaves with joy.

To be sure, the cross Thistle looked a little surly, and talked of his country; but the bonny Heath-flower said:—"Smooth your rough stem, brother; it is all right. We should make no figure by ourselves. We shall be safe under the shadow of the Royal Rose. See, the merry little Shamrock is blending her green leaves with those of our Queen; and the tall, stiff Leek has crept under her boughs, that she may not be cast out as a weed."

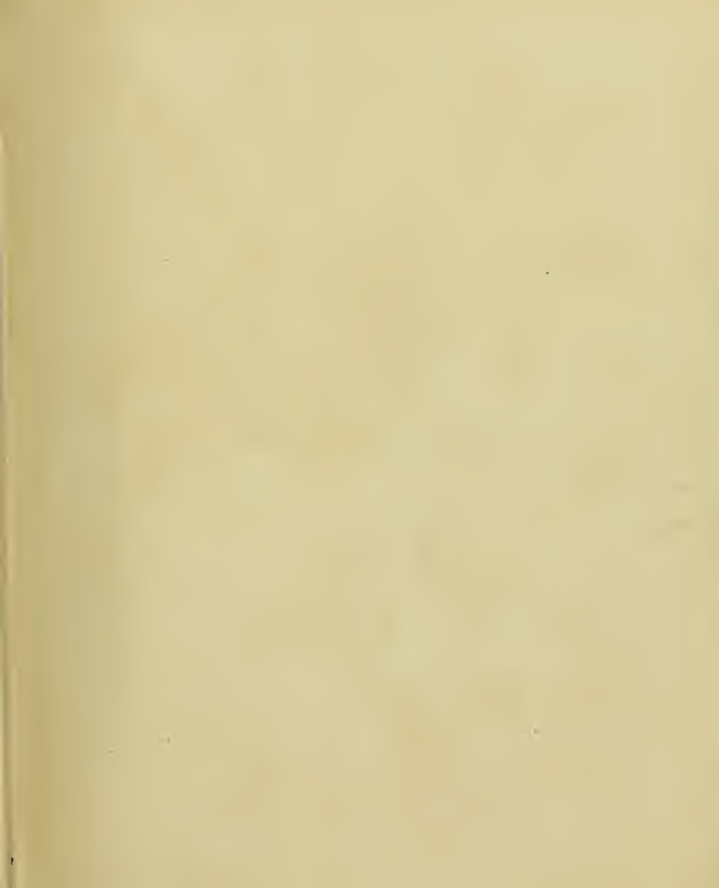
Then the Rose blushed deep with joy to see all her subjects at peace; and she spread her branches over the purple Heath-flower, and the wild, lovely Shamrock, and the strange, old, stubborn Leek, and they flourished in her sweet shadow. And she turned to the fair Lily, and twined her leaves round her, and said:—"This is the proudest day we have known since our forefathers blended into one glorious stem the rival Roses of England. Thus the Lily and the Rose shall be friends and allies for ever."

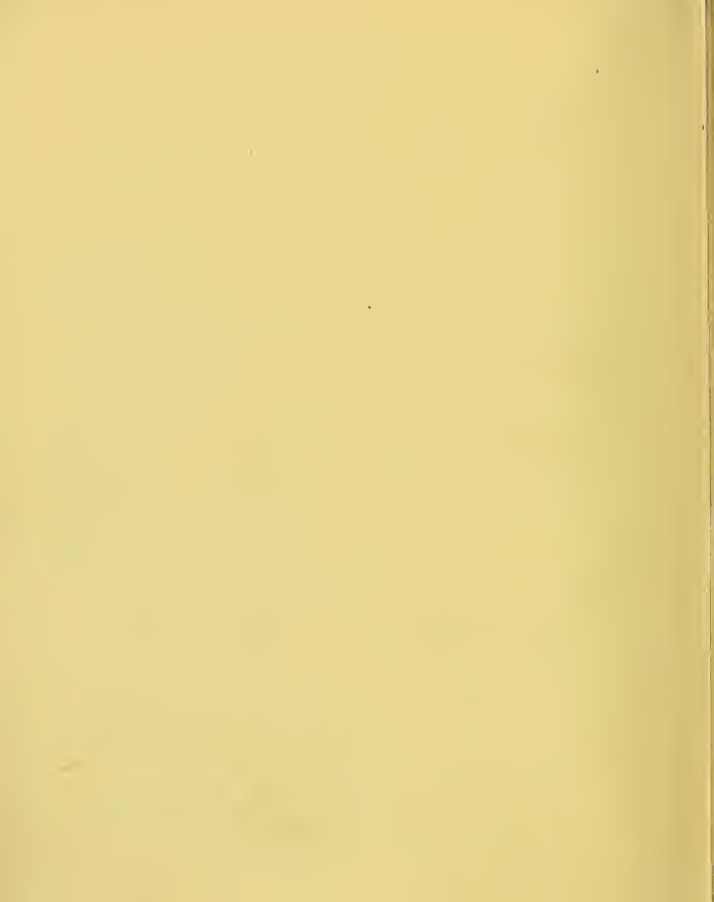
Then all the blooming people of the garden formed themselves into a pretty group, which in the language of flowers meant—

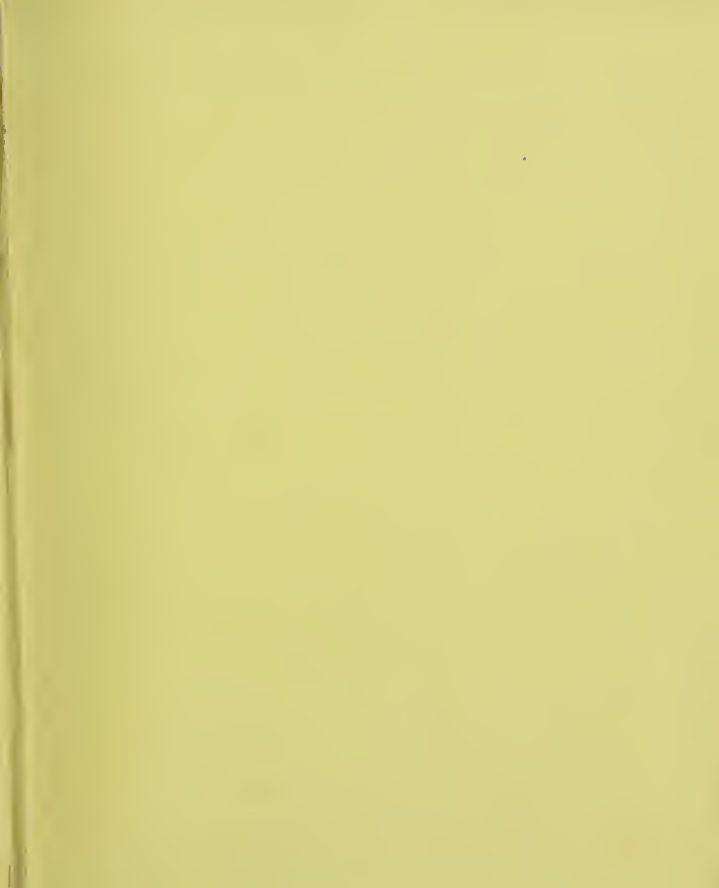
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